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C.I.A.'s Security Was Lax, According to Convicted Spy

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MANASSAS, Va., Feb. 10 — Larry Wu-Tai Chin, the former C.I.A. analyst convicted last week of spying for China for 30 years, said today that it was "easy" to evade the Central Intelligence Agency's security procedures and steal reams of classified documents.

In his first interview since his arrest last November, Mr. Chin said he was never searched when he left work at the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, an arm of the C.I.A. that translates and interprets material gathered from radio broadcasts and newspapers.

"It was easy to do," he recalled. "They do not search your body when you go out." Mr. Chin said he was giving the interview to two reporters because he was eager to tell his story. He said he originally talked to F.B.I. agents about his activities because "consciously or unconsciously I wanted the world to know what I did was for the good of U.S.-Chinese relations."

Mr. Chin was convicted last week by a Federal jury on charges of espionage, conspiracy and filing false tax returns. No date has been set for his sentencing.

C.I.A.'s Security Questioned

The case has raised several questions about the C.I.A.'s security procedures. A memorandum filed by the prosecution shows that Mr. Chin was given only one polygraph, or lie-detector, test in his 30 years as a contract employee and staff officer.

Mr. Chin was given the polygraph test in 1970, after he was hired as a full-time intelligence officer in the headquarters of foreign broadcast service in northern Virginia. It was the standard polygraph given to all prospective C.I.A. employees.

In the next 11 years Mr. Chin never again underwent a polygraph exam, even though in 1974 his security clearance was upgraded from top secret to "top secret, codeword," a higher classification, according to trial testimony.

In the same period Mr. Chin was audited seven times by the Internal Revenue Service, which questioned whether his salary as a Government employee could support the expenses he was showing from his array of rental properties.

Defector Tipped Off Officials

But suspicions at the C.I.A. were not raised until 1983, when intelligence sources say a high-level Chinese defector tipped off American officials.

Prosecutors contended that Mr. Chin was paid more than \$150,000 by the Chinese. They said he maintained multiple foreign bank accounts, owned gold overseas and held title to about 30 rental properties.

Mr. Chin said he believed that a security agent from the C.I.A. covertly interviewed him once, in 1974 or 1975. He recalled that a person identifying

himself as a Commerce Department official came to his house in Dale City, Va., and asked him about his sources of income and where he bought his furniture. He said he believed the person was really a C.I.A. agent.

"I said most of my furniture was bought from yard sales, which was true," said Mr. Chin. "I lived very modestly."

Stansfield Turner, Director of C.I.A. under President Carter, said in an interview last year that potentially lax security at the agency was a major concern in his tenure. Mr. Turner said he had instituted random searches of briefcases at the agency's headquarters offices in Langley, Va., but he said he was unsure whether these procedures were used at the Foreign Broadcast Information Service office.

Documents Under His Coat

"One of my first impressions when I went to work at the C.I.A. was that security was terrible," said Mr. Turner.

Mr. Chin testified at his trial that he hid documents in his coat.

A C.I.A. spokesman declined to say whether the Chin case and the conviction on espionage charges of Sharon Scranage, another C.I.A. employee, had prompted any specific changes. "We're always looking at security procedures," said Kathy Pherson, the spokesman. "It's not going to be one event that causes us to look at things."

In a 30-minute interview at the Prince William-Manassas Regional Adult Detention Center, Mr. Chin quoted from Chinese military strategists and world history to justify his decision to steal classified documents and provide them to the Chinese.

One of only two C.I.A. employees convicted of espionage while employed by the agency, Mr. Chin's motivation and character set him apart from others charged in the recent spate of spy cases. His C.I.A. personnel files show his supervisors were highly impressed with his abilities as a linguist and interpreter of Chinese political developments.

Mr. Chin said he had no regrets about his decision to talk with F.B.I. agents last Nov. 22. The agents confronted him with an account of his activities that intelligence sources say was gleaned from a high-level Chinese defector. Mr. Chin told the agents that night that he began spying for the Chinese in 1952, when he told a Chinese intelligence agent about his interviews of Chinese prisoners of war in Korea.

But today Mr. Chin said he did not begin stealing documents until 1970, when he joined the headquarters of broadcast service and was given a clearance to top-secret material. That year, he said he came across a classified message from President Nixon to Congress that revealed the Administration's hopes for a reconciliation with China.



United Press International

Larry Wu-Tai Chin

He said he was hoping to bolster the pragmatic faction in China, led at the time by Zhou Enlai. With the secret documents, Mr. Chin said he hoped to accelerate a warming of relations between the United States and China.

"When I think about what I have accomplished — the improvement of the livelihood of one billion Chinese people — my imprisonment for life is a very small price to pay," he said. "It was worth it. I have nothing to regret."

Mr. Chin, a tall, thin man, read from a single handwritten sheet of paper in which 20 points for the interview were set out in Chinese characters. He called himself a "patriotic American" and acknowledged that he had no right to make on his own momentous decisions about American foreign policy.

Still, he said, "The ends justify the means."

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